

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T VALLETTA 1963

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT, XF

SUBJ: MINTOFF ON THE MIDDLE EAST

1. AFTER I HAD DELIVERED INFORMATION ON SPECIAL PAYMENTS TO PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF EVENING OCTOBER 2 HE DETAINED ME FOR OVER AN HOUR TO UNLOAD HIS VIEWS ON THE MIDDLE EAST. EARLY IN DISCUSSION, MINTOFF MADE CURIOUS REMARK WHICH APPARENTLY INTENDED TO ESTABLISH CORDIAL SETTING. THIS WAS TO EFFECT THAT HE IN RECENT MONTHS HAD NOT BEEN GIVING U.S. ANY PROBLEMS IN FIELD OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. I IMMEDIATELY REPLIED HE IN FACT HAD BEEN GIVING US FITS. I THEN INVENTORIED HIS INITIATIVES OR ACTIONS, INCLUDING HIS ORIGINAL CALL ON SIHANOUK IN PEKING LAST YEAR, RECOGNITION OF NORTH KOREA AND FREEZING OUT SOUTH KOREANS BY REFUSING TO LET AMBASSADOR PRESENT CREDENTIALS, RECOGNITION OF SIHANOUK'S GOVERNMENT, MALTESE POSITION ON KOREAN ITEM IN UNGA AND FINALLY RECOGNITION OF VIET CONG. I MADE CLEAR THAT ALL OF THESE ACTIONS, NONE OF WHICH APPEARED TO BRING ANY BENEFITS TO MALTA, WERE PAINFUL TO U.S.

2. MINTOFF TOOK PRACTICALLY NO NOTICE OF MY OBSERVATIONS AND PLUNGED
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AHEAD WITH HIS PITCH ON ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION.

3. HE SPOKE AT LENGTH ABOUT HIS CONCERNS THAT THE MIDDLE EAST IS SOONER OR LATER HEADED FOR ANOTHER ARMED CONFLICT AND HE IS CONVINCED IT WOULD INVOLVE MALTA. WHILE HIS EARNESTNESS WAS BEYOND DOUBT, THE LINE HE TOOK WAS ESSENTIALLY THAT OF HIS ARAB FRIENDS, EVEN THOUGH HE INSISTED THAT HIS RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL WERE GOOD. MAIN POINTS HE STRESSED WERE:

(A) U.S. MUST INFLUENCE ISRAEL TO MOVE, BY WHICH HE MEANT BEGIN WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORIES;

(B) WESTERN EUROPEAN LEADERS AGREED WITH HIM, ARE FED UP WITH ISRAEL BUT CANNOT SAY SO IN PUBLIC BECAUSE OF SOME DOMESTIC PROBLEMS;

(C) THE BEST HOPE NOW WOULD BE FOR THE WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO TAKE THE LEAD TO SEEK A SOLUTION BUT THEY MUST HAVE U.S. HELP IN TERMS OF PRESSURE ON ISRAEL;

(D) ARABS CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL SINCE THIS WOULD BE AN UNBEARABLE HUMILIATION FOR THEM.

4. FOREGOING WAS SPELLED OUT IN GREAT LENGTH AND WITH CONSIDERABLE REPETITION. MINTOFF REFERRED TO DISCUSSIONS WITH ARAB LEADERS AND HINTED VAGUELY AT A "PLAN TO MOVE FORWARD". BUT I WAS UNABLE TO GET ANYTHING SPECIFIC BEYOND HIS INSISTENCE THAT THE ISRAELIS MUST BEGIN TO WITHDRAW BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE CAN HAPPEN.

5. MY REPLIES TO MINTOFF WERE LARGELY CENTERED ON FACT THAT ISRAELIS COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO WITHDRAW WITHOUT EITHER SECURITY GUARANTEES OR ANY SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT. I REMINDED HIM OF THE CAREFULLY BALANCED PACKAGE EMBODIED IN RESOLUTION 242 AND POINTED OUT THAT ITS VARIOUS PARTS

COULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT SOME SORT OF DIRECT OR INDIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ARABS AND ISRAELIS. THIS ONLY LED HIM BACK TO REITERATION OF IMPOSSIBILITY FOR ARABS TO NEGOTIATE WITH ISRAELIS, AND HIS INSISTENCE THAT RESOLUTION 242 REALLY MEANS WITHDRAWAL AND NOT MUCH ELSE.

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6. MINTOFF SUGGESTED THAT ONE WAY TO BEGIN PROCESS WAS FOR ISRAELIS TO BEGIN WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ARABS REOCCUPYING THE VACATED TERRITORY; THE U.S. COULD PROVIDE GUARANTEE TO ISRAELIS THAT IF THEY THEN TRIED TO MOVE IN, U.S. WOULD STOP THEM. I TOLD HIM THAT SUCH A GUARANTEE WAS NOT IN THE CARDS AND THAT IN ANY EVENT WHAT APPEARED TO BE A PROPOSAL FOR AN ISRAELI-AMERICAN FORMAL ALLIANCE AGAINST THE ARABS IS HARDLY THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE ARAB-

AMERICAN RELATIONS. I SUGGESTED THAT IF HE BELIEVED WESTERN EUROPEAN NATIONS WERE THE ONES TO TAKE CHARGE, HE SHOULD PROPOSE TO THEM THAT THEY PROVIDE THIS SORT OF GUARANTEE.

7. MINTOFF INSISTED THROUGHOUT CONVERSATION THAT HE WAS NOT SEEKING ROLE OF MEDIATOR HIMSELF ALTHOUGH HE HAD GOOD CONTACTS WITH ARAB LEADERS AND WAS PREPARED TO BE HELPFUL WHERE POSSIBLE. I POINTED OUT TO HIM U.S. WAS REPRESENTED IN MOST ARAB COUNTRIES AND THAT ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WAS NOT A PROBLEM WITH US.

8. COMMENT: OUTCOME OF CONVERSATION WAS SIMPLY THAT BOTH OF US AGREED SITUATION FULL OF RISKS BUT THAT WE HAD DIFFERENT ASSESSMENTS OF HOW TO APPROACH THE PROBLEM. I CANNOT QUESTION THE SINCERITY OF MINTOFF'S FEELING ON THE SUBJECT BUT HE PERSISTS IN IGNORING SOME ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS. HE IS CLEARLY MORE RESPONSIVE TO ARAB CONCERNS THAN TO THE ISRAELIS.
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